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C O N F I D E N T I A L ACCRA 000612

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FOR AF/W DANA BANKS/TEITELBAUM, AF/FO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [GH](#)
SUBJECT: NDC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JOHN EVANS ATTA-MILLS
VOWS NDC WILL NOT COME TO POWER BY SHEDDING BLOOD; WILL
SEEK BETTER LIFE FOR ALL

REF: ACCRA 605

Classified By: Ambassador Pamela E. Bridgewater, for reasons 1.5 (b)

1. (C) Summary. This is the second in a series reporting the Ambassador's discussions with presidential candidates and key interlocutors. National Democratic Party flag bearer John Evans Atta-Mills, looking and sounding strong and projecting energy and confidence, said he is "no one's puppet"; the December elections will be hard fought; his administration will put people first, be inclusive, assume power without violence, and improve the quality of life for Ghanaians. Mills said his government would also establish an independent non-partisan team to oversee disbursement of oil revenues and be open and transparent. On the international front, Ghana will champion peace and support reform. The African continent needs a new breed of leaders to move both ECOWAS and the African Union forward. As for Zimbabwe, Mills believes "Mugabe has overstayed his time, overplayed his hand, but Tsvangirai is not a viable alternative and lacks credibility. Americans, he said are his greatest friends. The NDC presidential aspirant said rumors of his death were obviously premature and that he "feels great and will lead Ghana to fight drugs, unemployment and corruption, with a firm faith that "God's will will be done." End summary.

NPP Shortcomings

2. (C) NDC flag bearer John Atta Mills, accompanied by former Ghanaian Ambassador to the United Nations and long-time senior advisor Kobi Awoonor, dined with the Ambassador and the DCM on May 6 for lunch at the Residence. Arriving a few minutes early, Mills wasted little time laying out where the current government has fallen short and sharing his vision for Ghana. Among the shortcomings he noted:

-- Political polarizaton has increased under Kufuor; unemployment is on the rise, and Ghana has allowed itself to become a center of drug trafficking in Africa, due in part to complicity by police and other high officials. These are concerns of Ghanaians and problems that the Government should do something about. Drug use among youth, for example has caused a scourge of crime and security issues. (Ambassador informed Mills that soon our Mission would have its own Drug Enforcement Administration Office in Ghana as an additional resource not only for our Mission but for the country to combat this serious problem of drug trafficking. It is not only in the interest of Ghana, the Ambassador added, but Africa as a whole, to not be complacent regarding narcotics trafficking, as the many positive gains Ghana and other countries have achieved could be easily destroyed).

-- Nepotism is at an all time high, with President Kufuor

having at least 20 close relatives as ministers or working at the Castle or in other positions of authority. Other examples cited were ostentatious spending for Ghana @50 celebrations, lavish outlays during the NPP presidential nomination run up (he claimed USD 15 million), the GOG's decision to build a "Palace" costing 50 million USD, a school feeding program where funds end up in private accounts, and a poor health delivery system. Turning to the impact of HIPC funds, Mills said "one can see signboards on latrines and classrooms" that had been constructed at a cost several times greater than normal. Mills claimed Parliament did not review nor decide how HIPC funds were to be used and that there is no oversight or accountability.

His Vision -- A better Life for All Ghanaians

13. (C) When asked what he would do differently if elected, Mills stated:

-- His would be a "humble, open and transparent government that would not mismanage resources and would not be corrupt."

Ghana needs a return to social morality in government. He would require all officials to publicly declare assets (if the current government did this, it would make for "very interesting public reading," he added); will promote transparency, dialogue, champion peace and support reform. Mills indicated that the 2008 elections will be open, transparent, free and fair and that he and the NDC do not simply want power for the sake of power. "We will not come to power through bloodshed," Mills vowed.

-- The NDC would not be "vindictive" but would work to heal

the polarized political environment. There would be no prosecution of current GOG officials, as this would not be in the best interest of the country. (Mills cited an example in 2001 when his wife was detained by the Bureau of National Investigation personnel on grounds Mills had received a car; he later received an apology at this show of power by the then newly elected NPP government.)

-- A linchpin for Mills' leadership would be to reduce the extreme poverty and improve the quality of life for the average Ghanaian. We must encourage business and investment to create wealth and improve social services for the underprivileged, he pledged.

-- His government would encourage the United States and the diplomatic community to keep Ghana on the radar and hold the country accountable for moneys and other development support provided.

-- His administration would establish an independent, multiparty group consisting also of civil society to oversee the oil revenues. This body would report to the public on a regular basis how much oil has been generated, how much money is received and how and where the funds should be spent. Representatives from all stake holders would be part of this process. He indicated that he would use best practices from other countries as a model. The oil revenues should be used to improve the lives of the Ghanaian people and not end up in personal bank accounts as has been the case in Nigeria and other countries.

Running Mate is First Rate

14. (C) Mills selected John Mahama as his running mate because he was the "best candidate." The Professor said he did not feel compelled to name a woman for the sake of naming a woman, but chose someone who would complement his efforts, be humble, honest and earnest. Mahama understands team work, something a running mate must understand, and he is confident the two will work hand and glove with a shared vision. (Mahama is from a Muslim family, but was educatead as a

Christian). Mills obtained approval of the Muslim community before naming Mahama. He noted that the NDC has 70 per cent of the nationwide Muslim votes and countrywide support -- north-south, and with youth and women.) Mills said he had no regrets or concerns that he did not choose a popular female party member, Betty Idrisu, who also happened to be the choice of former President Jerry John Rawlings and his wife Nana Konadu Rawlings.

No Faith in Electoral Commission

15. (C) Professor Mills stated that he has no faith in the Electoral Commission, citing outstanding issues from the 2004 election which still have not been resolved by the courts. Mills also recalled the recent acknowledgement by the EC that registration records in 13 districts in Ashanti showed inflated numbers of voters by some 600,000 names. Mills firmly believed that someone in the EC knew what was going on and encouraged the admission. Mills reiterated that the Ghanaian electorate are making up their minds; that they have invested a great deal to strengthen democracy in the country and he doubts very seriously if there will be unrest similar to what has happened in Kenya and Nigeria.

Foreign Policy -- Friends Everywhere

16. (C) Mills said that "everyone is a friend" and that he will foster and maintain good relations with other democracies. "Americans are my greatest friends" he noted with a broad smile, and he promised to lead Ghana by his personal example of a clean government that will act in the best interest of his country always. Turning to other parts of the continent, Mills waxed lyrical at the behavior of some African leaders -- Obasanjo of Nigeria received strong criticism for stealing from his country, and Mills was chagrined by President Kufuor and ECOWAS President Chabbas' support for a third term for Obasanjo. If elected, Mills would re-name the major Accra thoroughfare President Kufuor named Osegun Obasanjo Way. Moving further south to Zimbabwe, Mills believes Mugabe had done a lot for the country early on, but has "now overstayed his time,

overplayed his hand and is now poised to destroy his legacy as a freedom fighter." Southern Africa's neighbors have not done what they should in putting pressure on Mugabe to demit office and relieve the suffering and difficulties for Zimbabweans. Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai is not, however a viable alternative; he cannot be trusted, lacks credibility and someone else must be selected soon to lead Zimbabwe. The African continent must have a new breed of leaders, to move both the AU and ECOWAS forward. Mills recalled how heads of state attend AU summits ill-prepared on agenda items, late, and in too many instances, only for protocol or to serve other personal interests.

Comment

17. (C) Professor Mills projected energy and confidence throughout. A clear message permeating the discussion was that he had distanced himself from Jerry Rawlings and that he was not afraid to do so. Mills is in the NDC driver's seat, and barring unforeseen circumstances, plans to stay there until the December poll. (Note: There are rumors that Rawlings cliques may try to force Mills to step down on health grounds. Mills confided that he is thinner now because he "gave up beer" owing to sinus problems, and lost weight in the process. End note.) Mills' views on the economy, drugs, unemployment and corruption are in synergy with his rivals. The true test will come, if he is elected, in how effectively he will be able to implement his plans. The NDC launched its campaign May 7 with a huge rally in

Accra, and we witnessed large crowds of enthusiastic supporters at the National Theatre. Mills will campaign as "Mr. Clean," hoping that this image and his previous record will help propel him into the Presidency. End comment.
BRIDGEWATER